Omoni

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by ConscientiousScribe

Summary

It’s been a long day for little Mao Mao.

Suggestion from /mmm/

The sun had begun to dip below the horizon. Waves of scarlet and ochre sprawled across the sky, mixing with the amethyst ridges of clouds like foam on an ocean wave. From the window she observed the transition of the sky above the encroaching shadows of the woodline. The occasional sud floated into the edge of her vision, popping into oblivion as the integrity of the bubbles faltered. A sink full of dishes, and several more batches to go, rounded out her schedule for the evening. It wasn't easy running the household of seven heroes, but she always made it work.

She hummed to herself as she repeated her routine. Submerge, scrub, rinse, stack. Bit by bit, she worked through her task, taking the occasional glance at the sky. Soon enough the stars would be out, and then she could trace constellations as she wrapped up. Stopping to enjoy the simple pleasures in life was an important lesson for her as a young woman, and one she hoped would stick with her progeny.

As the last of the sun disappeared over the tops of the evergreens that surrounded their estate, an unexpected rapping of the front door shook her from her routine.

"*Mouyah*," she muttered to herself, reaching for a washcloth. She wasn't expecting anyone to be back so soon. The kids and her husband were supposed to be training in the mountains for the next few days, and it wasn't like Shin to call off a training trip.

Tossing the cloth over her shoulder, she opened the main door. She stepped aside, expecting Shin or Brunhilde to walk through. Instead, she found herself looking down at the shadow of her youngest - little Mao Mao - as he sniffled in the doorway.

"Mao Mao," she exclaimed, dropping to her knees with her arms spread wide, "Why are you home so soon?"

Mao Mao held the hilt of his beloved Geraldine in his hands, and let the sword clatter to the floor as he scampered into his mother's arms. She embraced him with a tight squeeze as she rested her head on his back. Through the fabric of her dress she could hear the stifled, stuttering sobs of her son.

“Shh, shh,” She cooed, rubbing a paw across his back. By degrees, young Mao Mao’s sobs softened into sniffles. His mother raised him with her arms, cradling him under one while she retrieved Geraldine with her free paw. With her son and his belongings secured, she nudged the door shut behind her and brought Mao Mao into the kitchen. She set Geraldine on the dining table and pulled up a chair, reclining with a sigh as she sat Mao Mao in her lap.

“What are you doing back here so early, dear?” she asked, stroking his head.

“I couldn’t keep up,” Mao Mao said, dejected. “Papa and the nunas started running, but they were so fast...”

Mao Mao’s mother sighed, glaring above her son at the night sky. This wasn’t the first time something like this had happened. If she had to guess, Shin probably didn’t even realize Mao Mao had tagged along with him. If they had left any later, poor Mao Mao would’ve been stuck alone in the woods with nobody to take care of him.

“They had you running all day,” she said, crouching over her son as she embraced him once more. “You must be so tired. Go wash up and I’ll make you some of your favorite rice cakes, okay?”

“I don’t wanna eat,” Mao Mao protested. “I don’t deserve dinner. I’m just gonna go to bed...”

“Don’t you dare,” Mao Mao’s mom chided. “It’s bad enough having one stubborn man in this house - you need to eat something, or you won’t grow big and strong like your papa. Now wash quickly, dinner will be ready soon!”

She gave her son another quick squeeze before setting him on the ground with a ruffling of his messy fur. “Yes, mama,” Mao Mao said, scampering off to the restroom.

Fortunately, she had already prepared part of the rice cakes before starting on the dishes. The rice was moist and pulverized into a paste. She just needed to mix in some vegetable oil and fold it all into strips. Clearing space on the countertop, she retrieved the pounded rice and added the oil. For several minutes she pounded the rice further, folding and manipulating it into cylinders. Once she was pleased with the result she turned on the stovetop. Adding stock,

pepper powder and sugar, she prepared the spicy sauce for the rice cakes. While the mixture heated up, she began to divvy up some of the thick rice logs into smaller, manageable strips. As she worked she listened to the water running in the other room.

“Mao Mao, don’t forget to get behind your ears!” She called out. A high pitched, unintelligible response came from the other side of the bathroom door.

“Should have just enough time,” she muttered to herself as she added some of the rice cakes to the boiling broth. In a couple minutes she would add some cut-up fish cakes to finish, and by the time Mao Mao changed into some fresh clothes, the meal would be complete.

The turned the burner of the stove off as she heard the bathroom door creak open, followed by the pattering of little paws up the stairs. She dipped a ladle into the pot, pulling out the thickest slices of rice cake and a couple fish cakes. They were his favorite, after all. She poured the thick stock and hot rice cakes onto a plate, placing it on the table next to a set of metal chopsticks. As she turned to make herself a plate she saw a tiny black figure dart by her periphery.

“Did you shower well?” She asked. Mao Mao grunted in affirmation, kicking himself onto the chair. She set her plate on the table, in front of the adjacent chair. Grabbing a set of chopsticks from a drawer, she clicked them together in her paw. “Let’s eat!”

The two of them ate in a comfortable silence, Mao Mao eating the fish cakes first before scooting the rice cakes around in the spicy sauce for a while. Once they cooled down to his liking he ate the rest, and his mom took both of their plates to the dirty pile to the left of the sink.

“You don’t want any more, Mao Mao?” She asked as she began to rinse off the plates.

“I’m full, mama.” He rang back.

“Alright,” She said as she set the rinsed plates to the left. “Then let’s get you to bed. I need you up bright and early to help me with chores!”

“Aw, mom,” Mao Mao groaned, “I wanted to practice with Geraldine tomorrow.”

“Tell you what,” Mao Mao’s mom said with a turn of her feet. “You help me with the laundry and I’ll help you with your striking.”

“Can I show you what papa taught me?!” Mao Mao asked, eyes going wide.

“Of course! I love seeing you demonstrate your proficiency,” she said as she bent down to pinch his cheek. “You’re becoming a hero so fast, just like your father.”

Mao Mao giggled, his face beaming. As she released her grip on his cheek, Mao Mao grabbed Geraldine off the table and took off towards the stairs.

“I’ll be right up,” Mao Mao’s mom said, grabbing the pot off the stove. “I just need to finish cleaning up, then I’ll read you a bedtime story.”

“Okay, mama!” He called from the base of the stairs. With a free paw he crossed one digit in front of the other, making a v-formation. “Love you!” He yelled.

Mao Mao’s mom returned the gesture. “I love you too, Mao Mao.”

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